



State of California
California Senior Legislature

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Representing Older Californians in San Joaquin County

October 4, 2002

Federal Communications Commission
c/o Commission Secretary, Marlene H. Dortch
445 12th Street SW, CY-B402
Washington, DC 20554

RE: Proceeding 02-306

Dear Federal Communications Commission:

Currently before your Commission is an application by SBC/Pacific Bell to offer long distance service to its subscribers in California. Among these subscribers are the senior citizens of the State of California who are rapidly growing in population and are expected to comprise over 20 percent of the State in the near future. Many within their ranks are quite elderly and easily confused and susceptible to the effects of market manipulation. In addition, it is not uncommon for these older citizens to be on limited incomes with little discretionary funds. Frequently, they are the victims of telecommunication vendors "slamming" resulting in excessive charges beyond their means. These include the hidden monthly fees and minimum usage charges of the long distance providers regardless of the volume of use generated by the individual.

The introduction of SBC/Pacific Bell into the long distance market should provide several benefits to our seniors. First, increased large-scale competition should impact the market and result in lowered costs for long-distance service. Ancillary to this may be overall lowered costs for packaged services as providers move into a complete array of service offerings competitively for local as well as long-distance. Secondly, Pacific Bell has publicly announced that it intends to not subject its customers to hidden fees and usage charges that other vendors include. If this is incorporated into the rate offering, it will relieve seniors of these pressures where some have experienced the effect of paying monthly fees with little or no actual long-distance usage. Thirdly, this offering will provide a level of simplification for decisions regarding service provider selection. It is quite common to hear complaints from senior citizens regarding the current confusion which has resulted after the Bell System breakup. Previously, it was only required to make a single contact for all of the telecommunication needs of an individual. The breakup has effectively splintered the effort to obtain services - long distance, local service, telecommunications equipment, etc. The benefits of the breakup, which was intended to lower rates, have been felt the least by our elders. While this added offering will effect cost saving competitive influences, it will also provide a simpler more understandable means for subscribers to select a single vendor for all of their needs, if they choose to do so.

Overall, SBC/Pacific Bell's proposed service offering should have positive benefits for all of the seniors in the State, whether they choose to utilize SBC/Pacific Bell as their server of choice or another vendor whose charges and fees should eventually be reduced as a result of the increased competition in all areas of service offerings.

I strongly urge you to move forward and approve the application so that the benefits can be realized in the near future.

Sincerely,


Joseph F. "Joe" Murphy
Senior Senator

